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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2720
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001340

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN (GEHRENBECK)

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SUBJECT: UPCOMING KYRGYZ ELECTIONS AND THE RECENT

REFERENDUM: VIEW FROM NARYN

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador's October 24 - 26th trip to Naryn Oblast provided an opportunity to measure the political pulse of ordinary Kyrgyz citizens, local politicians, opposition and pro-government parties, and NGO representatives in one of Kyrgyzstan's poorest provinces. Residents of Naryn, fresh from the October 21st constitutional referendum, expressed pessimism about the political process and upcoming parliamentary elections. There are also indications that opposition parties are not being made to feel welcome in the oblast.

Voter Turnout - a Measly 81 Percent

12. (C) When the Ambassador asked the Deputy Governor of Naryn Oblast about voter turnout, he reported that Naryn Oblast's turnout was "not great" at 81 percent. The Deputy Governor confided that Naryn Oblast was in fifth place in terms of voter turnout among the oblasts and that "we were worried we would get in trouble." He insisted that Naryn Oblast did not exaggerate voter turnout or the number of votes in favor of the referendum. Likewise, the Mayor of Naryn claims that turnout in the oblast capital was 67-68 percent. Anecdotal accounts from NGO's, political party representatives, journalists, and our own observers indicate, however, that turnout in Naryn was much lower than reported figures. Moreover, many people in Naryn seemed genuinely confused about the purpose of the referendum. One villager thought that the referendum was about whether to dissolve parliament. At least one elderly woman asked a fellow voter, "Who are we voting for?"

¶3. (C) When questioned about the upcoming parliamentary elections, several politically active residents of Naryn indicated that they fear the parliamentary elections will be "even worse" than the referendum. One said she expected to see murders in the lead-up to the elections. Another said that the people of Naryn are sick of "dirty, false" elections. One journalist described the political situation as "worse than during President Akayev." While denying that "administrative resources" will be used in the elections, the Mayor agreed with Ambassador that it would be difficult for the recently formed presidential party Ak Zhol to win without them. He added, he was part of the "Vertical of Power" and bound to uphold the President's policies.

¶4. (C) There are indications that intimidation of opposition parties may have already begun. The Ambassador's trip to Naryn happened to coincide with the party conference, also taking place in Naryn, of the most popular opposition party, Ata-Meken. One local Ata-Meken representative reported that his party was being hassled by police, who threatened to shut down the party conference because of permit issues. The Mayor of Naryn confirmed that there was a problem with the permit, but said the permit requirement was legitimate since the party conference was taking place in a government-owned theater.

¶5. (SBU) After the party conference, the Ata-Meken motorcade containing top party leadership (former deputies Omurbek Tekebayev, Temir Sariyev, Kubatbek Baybolov, and businessman Omurbek Abdrahmanov) was traveling back to Bishkek when it was stopped on a mountain pass by unknown men in camouflage. According to "Komsomolskaya Pravda Kyrgyzstan," the men in camouflage proceeded to beat the party's bodyguards and

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assistants and even fired automatic weapons. The men in camouflage later turned out to be MVD police, who claimed that the whole incident was a case of mistaken identity, as police were staking out narcotics traffickers and confused the two groups of vehicles.

¶6. (C) Comment: Many of the people the Ambassador encountered in Naryn Oblast reported feeling more politically disenfranchised than at any other point in recent history. It is not clear whether the economic circumstances described in Reftel will create apathy about the upcoming parliamentary elections or fuel discontent and political action.
YOVANOVITCH